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THE NEW IRELAND.—XII.

CONCLUSION.

BY SYDNEY BROOKS.

I HAVE written these articles to little purpose if I have not persuaded some, at least, of my readers that the Irish Question is not a question of politics merely. There are many things in Ireland, as I see it, more important than politics. The necessity of completing as speedily as possible the transfer of the title-deeds in the soil from landlord to tenant and of bringing the seven-century-old agrarian struggle to an end, is one of them. The yet more vital necessity of seeing to it that the new proprietors are enabled to maintain themselves in a state of economic independence is another. There is no hope of contentment in Ireland until landlordism is finally abolished. But there is no hope of prosperity in Ireland if the abolition of landlordism means simply the handing over of the soil from one set of incapables to another. I have emphasized this point more than once in the preceding articles. But it is so urgent to the proper understanding of the Irish problem, as it is to-day and as it will be for many years to come, that I am tempted to dwell on it a moment longer. When the policy of land purchase has fulfilled its mission, the Irish agrarian question, as we have known it since the first beginnings of Anglo-Irish relations, will have ceased to exist. Hitherto it has been mainly social and political, a struggle between two classes over rent and ownership. Henceforward it will be mainly technical and economic, a struggle not for possession, but for a livelihood. On the ability of the new proprietors to make farming and stock-raising pay depend the peace and prosperity of the country. At present, as I have before insisted, they are lamentably ill-equipped for a competitive agricultural existence. Taken as a whole, the Irish peasants and

small farmers have neither the technical skill nor the education nor the capital nor the business experience adequate to their new responsibilities. Large numbers of them are in debt to the local gombeenman; nearly all have been more or less demoralized by long years of agrarian agitation, by the habit of leaning on others and by the lassitude and hopelessness that brood over rural Ireland; they have forgotten what little they or their fathers ever knew about tillage; even as stock-raisers, with every advantage of soil and climate in their favor, they fall miserably below the standards of Argentina and America; and the dreary slovenliness of their mode of life is the despair of social reformers. Yet these are the men who have the future of Ireland in their hands and who represent the ultimate security for the repayment of the loan of \$1,000,000,000 advanced, or about to be advanced, by the British Treasury to enable them to become the sole owners of their holdings.

There is a twofold danger in such a situation. The first danger is that just as in the past there have been campaigns against the payment of rents to landlords, so in the future there may be a campaign against the payment of the annuities to the State. It is true that experience so far does not make the risk appear very formidable. Some 75,000 Irish peasants purchased their holdings by the aid of public credit before the Act of 1903 was dreamed of. In very few instances has there been a failure to pay the instalments of the purchase-money punctually. It has been found that the moral and material results of proprietorship both discourage agitation and increase the yield of the land. At this moment those who are in arrears under all the Acts are, I believe, under one per cent. of the total number of purchasers. This is encouraging, but is it quite final? A Government, one must remember, is an unfeeling landlord; it can make no allowances for crop failure or cattle disease; it can listen to no excuses; its transactions are all on a cash, and not a credit, basis. Many of the new proprietors who have been seduced into coming to terms with their landlords by an immediate cancellation of arrears, or by the scarcely less attractive expedient of merging them in the purchase-money, will find, I fear, when a bad year comes, that the annuities they have agreed to pay are wholly beyond their means. In which case what is the Government to do? Wholesale evictions for the non-payment of the annuities would mean

plunging Ireland into an unthinkable anarchy. No one can feel absolutely sure that the new owners of the soil have not at the back of their minds a half-formed hope that fifteen or twenty years from now they may somehow be able to escape from the payment of their annual instalments. Irish politics will go on, but how can they go on without the agrarian commotion which for nearly forty years has been their life-blood? If the pacification of the peasantry means the depletion of the Nationalist exchequer and the gradual attrition of interest in the Home-Rule movement, may not the politicians feel all the more drawn to some desperate stroke for the recovery of their dwindling influence? And if they do, what course is open to them except to start an agitation against the remittance of the annuities? I am not at all certain that the future of Irish politics may not belong to the party that first forges anew the links that are now being weakened, and indeed severed, between agrarianism and Home Rule. At some period of acute agricultural distress, and making the fullest use of the argument that England has already overtaxed Ireland to an amount exceeding that of the purchase-money advanced, I find it not impossible to imagine a party proclaiming, and enlisting formidable support to carry through, a general strike against the instalments. I do not by any means rate this possibility high, but neither can I altogether exclude it. Were it ever to become near and real, the future of Anglo-Irish relations might rival, might even surpass, the bloody, insensate tragedy of their past.

But there is another, and in some ways a not less disheartening, peril to be faced. It is that the new proprietors may slowly be squeezed by their inefficiency or indebtedness or sloth out of an independent position, and that after dabbling unsuccessfully with stock-raising or exhausting the soil by improvident tillage, they may be forced to sell their lands to the money-lender and the publican. In which case the whole policy of land purchase will have been defeated, the dream of a secure and prospering peasant proprietary will have vanished and a new race of landlords will have been called into existence ten times more avaricious, mean and tyrannical than the worst member of the old type of English absentee. To ward off so hideous a catastrophe seems to me a task of infinitely more moment to Irish welfare than empty wrangling over the machinery of constitutional government. It

can be warded off if leaders and people keep their vision clear and their will-power active. There is no Irish need more imperative than a sustained and many-sided effort to put the greatest of all Irish industries on a sound footing by translating into terms of positive achievement Sir Horace Plunkett's formula of "better farming, better business and better living." Better farming is primarily a matter of technical instruction; better business depends first and foremost upon the extension of the co-operative movement; better living can be secured only as the result of many diverse agencies working for the reform of domestic economy and the brightening of rural existence.

Here is a vast and beneficent work waiting to be done, one that may well tax all the energy and devotion of which a united Ireland is capable before it can be successfully accomplished. Obviously it is a task which laws made in England and speeches delivered in the House of Commons can do little to further and which can only be carried through by the daily self-sacrificing toil of Irishmen in Ireland. And around this central problem of rehabilitating Irish rural life, morally, materially and socially, are grouped many subsidiary questions. There is, for instance, the question of promoting both village and major industries and of thus doing something to check the tide of emigration. This in its turn is partly a question of technical education and partly, indeed chiefly, of character, discipline, confidence and public tranquillity. The opportunities for industrial expansion in Ireland far exceed the aptitudes of the people for profiting by them. It is, indeed, on the face of it an amazing anomaly that a mainly agricultural country, with over \$300,000,000 lying idle in her banks, and her enormous wealth of cattle, sheep and pigs, should be importing every year over \$8,000,000 of boots and shoes, \$800,000 of soap, \$500,000 of candles, \$500,000 of woollen goods, \$1,800,000 of butter, \$1,500,000 of artificial manures and \$5,000,000 of agricultural machinery. Intimately bound up with the industrial problem is the question of furnishing a cheap, rapid and co-ordinated system of transit and communication. There are in Ireland some 4,500 miles of railway track, divided among no less than seventeen principal companies and presided over by at least twenty-six boards of directors. The rolling-stock is inadequate, freight rates for merchandise are more than a third higher than in England and increase with the years, passenger fares are

still more excessive, the whole system is ill connected and unenterprising, and the preferential through rates and the strangling of canal competition have made the Irish railways almost as much the enemies as the friends of Irish progress. No country so palpably awaits material betterment. In the extension and wholesale reformation of her railways, in the improvement of harbors and the building of piers, in the reclamation of her million and a half acres of waste land, in the development of a broad system of arterial drainage and in reafforestation there is ample scope and reward for constructive enterprise of a kind that the grant of Home Rule or the withholding of Home Rule is powerless to affect. And overtopping all these problems there are the supreme questions of national character and of national education—of how to instil into the Irish people those qualities of moral hardihood in which they are lacking and of how to rescue their mental development from a cramping, clerical domination.

Emphatically, therefore, the Irish Question is not all politics, and those Americans who think they have solved it by recommending that Ireland should be treated as though she were a State in the American Union have yet, in my judgment, to master its alphabet. Nevertheless, to the entire outside world, and probably also to the majority of Englishmen, the essence of the Irish problem is contained in advocacy of, or antagonism to, Home Rule. As I have argued before, and as I shall argue again a little later on, I believe this view to be incomplete and mistaken. The Constitutional issue is undoubtedly a part and an essential part of the Irish Question, but it is not and cannot be the whole of it; and while I am personally convinced that it ought to be decided, and eventually will be decided, in the way the majority of Irishmen desire, I am not less sure that Home Rule is no *panacea* and that it will leave unsettled as many problems as it solves. For all present purposes, however, the matter is one of merely academic interest. Home Rule, as a legislative possibility, is considerably further off to-day than it was in 1886. I cannot persuade myself that the Liberals will again make it a part of their programme, and even if they did, no one could for a moment doubt that the House of Lords would reject any measure of Home Rule that was comprehensive enough to satisfy the Nationalist party. Thus the question of Home Rule is permanently postponed to the question of the House of Lords and the signs are few and faint that

the British people really desire any alteration in the constitutional powers of the Upper House or are willing, under whatever safeguards of delay, to allow a chance majority in the House of Commons to pass into law whatever measures they pleased. The Conservatives, it is true, are released from the fear that their Bills may be mutilated or rejected by the Lords, but then what chance is there that the Conservatives will abandon the one plank in their platform which has never shifted in the last five-and-twenty years and consent to adopt the Nationalist view of Irish affairs? Frankly I see no chance whatever. Even when it is made clear beyond the possibility of doubt that Tariff Reform—the first constructive item on the Conservative programme—can only be carried by the help of the Irish vote, I do not believe that the Conservatives will agree to any compact or alliance that involves, as one of its terms, the setting up of a legislative assembly in Dublin. It is, indeed, conceivable that Home Rule may come as part of a general scheme for easing the Imperial Parliament of some of its overwhelming burdens and for resolving the United Kingdom into a sort of federated monarchy in which Englishmen, Irishmen, Scotchmen and Welshmen would exercise a separate and equal control over their own local affairs. But this is a development which lies too far off, even if it ever comes at all, to be worth discussing to-day. Yet short of some such heroic transformation I discern little or no prospect of a Home-Rule Bill being again introduced into the House of Commons. It is, indeed, scarcely too much to say that the idea of settling or attempting to settle this part of the Irish question at a single stroke has been abandoned by all responsible politicians. The Liberals made the effort in 1886 and they suffered, in consequence, nearly twenty years of banishment. They are not likely to repeat it. That what is compendiously known as the Irish Question can only be grappled with piecemeal fashion, by taking one step at a time and by resisting the temptation of large and revolutionary schemes, and that Home Rule will not be so much granted as evolved—evolved from the progressive devolution of purely Irish business to purely Irish bodies—may now, in my judgment, be accepted as axioms of British politics.

If this view, as I believe it to be, is well founded, it is clearly unnecessary for me to enter at any length into the arguments for or against the Home-Rule Bills of 1886 and 1893. Most of

their provisions were substantially identical. Both Bills established an Irish Legislature with an Irish Executive responsible to it. Both divided the proposed Legislature into two Houses. Both placed the judiciary and the police under full Irish control. Both forbade the Irish Parliament to deal with matters affecting the Crown, with the naval or military forces of the Kingdom, with trade, navigation and coinage, and with the establishment and endowment of any religious institution. Both maintained the Customs Union and debarred the Irish Legislature from imposing duties on British or foreign goods. Both granted to Ireland the right to levy her own taxes and both fastened upon her the responsibility of paying to the Treasury in London an annual contribution amounting to eight and a half per cent. of the British revenue. Where they differed was in the arrangements made for representing Ireland in the Imperial Parliament. In the Bill of 1886 no Irish members were to sit at Westminster and Ireland would thus enjoy taxation without representation. In the Bill of 1893 eighty Irish members were to attend the British Parliament and vote, if they chose, on Imperial and Irish questions, but on no others. This plan was hopelessly unworkable and hardly stood a day's discussion in the House. Mr. Gladstone abandoned it in favor of retaining eighty Irish members at Westminster with plenary powers of voting. The objection to this was that Ireland would then be governing not merely herself, but England, Scotland and Wales, too. But it was not on any point of detail that the Bills were rejected, the first by the House of Commons, the second by the House of Lords, and both with the overwhelming concurrence of the English people. What decided their fate was, first, a conviction that their introduction was the price of a disreputable deal with the Irish vote; secondly, indignation at the recklessness which would thus throw the British Constitution into the melting-pot; thirdly, an instinctive perception that Home Rule was but a stepping-stone to separation and that two Parliaments would entail endless friction and suspicion, and possibly open war between England and Ireland; fourthly, the belief that Home Rule meant Rome Rule and that Mr. Gladstone was handing over loyal and industrious Protestants to the mercies of rebellious, predatory and bigoted Catholics; fifthly, the plain determination of Ulster to fight rather than submit to be plundered by a Catholic Parliament in Dublin;

sixthly, the memory of the murderous outrages on man and beast committed, if not at the instigation, certainly without the disapproval, of the Nationalist M.P.'s; and finally, the fierce contempt and hatred felt by the British masses for the Irish people.

The force of many of these arguments and emotions has considerably weakened in the last twenty years. There is to-day a frank recognition of the evils which English misgovernment has inflicted upon Ireland. There is an honest desire to make reparation. There is an effort, almost pathetic in its futility, to understand the Irish character. The old bitterness and rancor have largely, if not wholly, disappeared. The stupid taunt that the Irish are unfit for self-government is now no longer heard. With the gradual emergence of Ireland from the more acute phases of agrarian unrest, with the gradual cessation of crime, the spirit in which the English people approach the Irish Question has been revolutionized. The absurdity of talking of Imperial Federation while Ireland, at the very heart of the Empire, remains disaffected is freely admitted. The irrational and exasperating contradictions in which the English democracy has involved itself by persisting in the impossible task of governing Ireland against the will of the Irish people are felt and deplored. Even Unionism has broadened out into a mellower, more tolerant creed and into a policy of constructive amelioration. It was the Unionist Party that took away from the British "garrison" its hold over Irish local government and created the County Councils on a broad and popular basis. It was the Unionists, again, who six years ago decreed the final abolition of landlordism and pledged the Imperial credit in the sum of nearly \$1,000,000,000 to turn Ireland into a country of peasant freeholders. A new generation has grown up in England that knows little or nothing of the catchwords and fears that so passionately stirred the country twenty years ago. I do not say that it favors Home Rule or that the fanatics of Ulster could not again play successfully upon its anti-Catholic prejudices and its witless fear of Imperial disruption. But I am confident that it is no longer so averse from Irish autonomy as it was, and that while it would probably reject any scheme and overthrow any party that aimed at attaining Home Rule by a single stroke, it would be willing to advance step by step towards the final goal of freedom and pacification. It sees, for instance, that the House of Commons grows

less and less able to discharge the enormous mass of business that falls upon it, and it has no instinctive objection to delegating some, at any rate, of its functions to a local Irish body. It is even, I think, beginning to realize that it is not enough merely to remove tangible grievances and that until the majority of the Irish people feel that they do in some sort control their own destinies and have in a measure a shaping hand in their own government, until they are made conscious of a harmony between Irish sentiment, instincts and responsibility and the daily work of Irish administration, the country will never be contented. And the growth of this consciousness has kept pace with and been paralleled by, as I have endeavored to make clear in the preceding articles, a momentous change in Ireland herself—the birth of a new spirit of unity and interdependence, the weakening of the old fainéant type of Unionism, the gradual but continuous approximation of all Irishmen towards a common centre. The resultant of these convergent and ancillary forces can only be a progressive expansion of Ireland's control over her own affairs. Mr. Birrell in 1907 brought in a Bill which, though very far from Home Rule, though it did not contain a hint or suggestion of any new legislative power or authority, though it did not authorize the levying of a single tax and left majestically unaffected the constitution of the United Kingdom, had the merit of establishing an Irish Council to take over the administration of eight of the principal departments of government, set up a separate Irish Treasury and, more important still, created a new department under lay control for the direction of Irish education. The Bill was rejected by the Irish people in a mass convention, partly because everybody knew that, if accepted by them, it would be thrown out by the House of Lords, partly because the Irish Party saw in the projected Council a body that might rival and distract attention from themselves, partly because the Sinn-Féiners stirred up opposition to the Bill as an "insult" to Ireland and effectively contrasted its narrow and restricted provisions with Mr. Gladstone's Home-Rule measures, partly because the priesthood would not for one moment tolerate the handing over of primary and secondary education to a board of laymen, but chiefly because the Irish people had not yet learned that Home Rule, if it ever comes at all, will come gradually, one stage at a time. I do not know that they have assimilated this fact even

now; but I am certain they will have to assimilate it or abandon all hope of eventual autonomy. This is not equivalent to saying that Home Rule is an unrealizable dream. The exact contrary is both my hope and my belief. Not a measure has been passed for Ireland during the past hundred years that was not a step towards final self-government. This process will unquestionably continue and no statesmanship can now restrain it. Even Unionists confess that Home Rule is at once inevitable and impossible—impossible, they mean, because they have never seen a Home-Rule Bill that promised to be workable, inevitable because the whole current of events both in England and in Ireland is setting full and fair towards it. How and when and in what form it will be granted I admit at once I do not know and dare hardly guess. But that ultimately, as the coping-stone to a successive enlargement of their liberties and opportunities, the Irish will find themselves in possession of a measure of self-government that will satisfy their national aspirations, seems to me little less than one of the certainties of the future.

But, after all, one comes back to the point that there is little England can do for Ireland compared with what the Irish can do for themselves. It is the penalty of bad government that it does more harm than its reformation can cure. English rule in Ireland has often been cruel, oftener still stupid, patronizing and inapplicable, and never more so than when best intentioned. It has helped to make, it has probably had a larger share than any other single cause in making, Ireland and the Irish people what they are to-day; and there are few defects in the Irish state, and few shortcomings in the Irish character, which cannot be traced back originally to English misgovernment, or which have not, at any rate, been intensified by that misgovernment. But no fallacy can be greater than to suppose that what bad legislation has done good legislation can undo. Human affairs are not so simple as all that, and the effects of a vicious policy will not only endure long after the policy itself has been reversed, but may even remain uninfluenced by its reversal. This is what has happened, and what will happen, in Ireland. It is only in the last seventy years or so that the English have seriously tried to make amends to Ireland for the afflictions of seven centuries, and only in the last fifteen years or so that the recuperative principle has been allowed even a partial chance. It seems to me idle to sup-

pose that a people who have been so crushed and oppressed as the Irish, and whose economic and mental growth has been so long and so deliberately stunted, can be brought back to health by a single restorative, or, indeed, by any restorative at all that is administered externally. Not only has England not overtaken the ill effects of her misrule in Ireland, but she never can overtake them. They have outdistanced any real help that she could render them; they can only be restrained and destroyed by the Irish themselves. England's power of assistance is limited merely to the removal of grievances, the redressing of injustices, the creation of opportunities, the adoption, so far as her imaginative obtuseness will permit her, of an attitude of understanding and sympathy. Beyond that she cannot go. The far more arduous task of rebuilding the national character of the Irish people is one that can only be grappled with in Ireland and by Irishmen. There is a striking passage in Mr. George A. Birmingham's novel, "Benedict Kavanagh," which says, as I cannot help thinking, almost the final word on this matter. A priest is pointing out to Benedict the improvement in the manners, surroundings and character of the people in a Connaught village. Benedict supposes that it is the priest who has done it for them. "No," comes the answer, "I have not done it for them. There you touch the great mistake which has brought to ruin so many fine-sounding schemes. Things must not be done for our people. They must learn to do things for themselves. Nothing, literally nothing, can be done from outside. Have we not had enough of that? Money poured out, wasted. Strangers coming to teach and going away disheartened. For our people there is only one hope, and that is in themselves, themselves alone."

Holding by this formula and its implications, I cannot for one moment persuade myself that Home Rule would bring the Irish millennium. The character and temperament of the people are altogether beyond England's power to influence; for whatever is remiss in their moral or economic aptitudes, they must find and furnish their own remedies. No legislation at Westminster, no mere adaptation of the constitutional machinery, can give them the force and virility, the balance and backbone, the perseverance, the contempt for unvaracity and deceit, and all the other strong qualities in which candor itself must admit their deficiency. One of the great troubles with Ireland is that no Irishman will say

what he thinks. In all politics one has to allow for a certain difference between private and public utterances, but in no politics is the difference so profound as in Irish. For bodies to pass resolutions to which all present are secretly opposed; for Irish politicians to deride in conversation and in private letters pretty nearly everything that they are engaged in upholding in Parliament and on the platform—these are the every-day phenomena of Irish affairs. Make-believe, a conscious insincerity and the miasma of moral cowardice permeate the entire country. There is no land in which there is more volubility of speech and less real liberty of thought, and as a consequence less democracy, than in Ireland, no land in which the individual counts for so little and the “organization,” whether clerical, political or agrarian, for so much. If half a dozen leading Nationalist M.P.’s were to say on a public platform one-half the things they mutter in private about the devitalizing tyranny of the Church over the social life and mental development of the people, it would do infinitely more for the essentials of Irish welfare than the most perfect of Home-Rule Bills. Over far too large a part of Ireland terrorism is the rule of life, opinion is no more than the bellowing of the loudest clique, civic spirit is represented by the wranglings and intrigues of factions, performance fails to follow promise, patriotism finds its only expression in a litter of histrionic “resolutions,” the very conception of industrial discipline seems to have perished, agriculture has become a question of rent and not of work, of how little can be paid for the land, not of how much can be got out of it, witnesses perjure themselves with Asiatic liberality, juries return verdicts that every man in the twelve knows to be against the evidence, the individual cowers beneath the priest, and the whole conduct of life is scaled down to a turbulent level of selfishness, langour, intimidation, inefficiency, falsity and superstition. It is precisely in such communities as these that the people are most forward in speaking of themselves as “our noble but oppressed race,” and in placing upon every shoulder but their own the responsibility both for their poverty and its relief. I quite admit that British misgovernment probably deserves most of the blame so freely ascribed to it, but I doubt whether it deserves it all. Too much self-pity, too much self-praise, added to misunderstanding and detraction from without, acting upon a national character always prone to an easy

fatalism, and reinforced by a convulsive history that has thrown to the surface all the unhealthy elements of society, have unquestionably confused the standards, misdirected the energies and weakened the moral fibre of but too many of the Irishry.

Home Rule in itself, it must surely be very clear, will not exercise these painful and debilitating qualities, or at least will not do so at once; and to advocate autonomy on the supposition that it will effect some immediate and miraculous transformation in the material fortunes or the moral texture of the Irish people seems to me altogether misguided. On the contrary, those who believe in Home Rule should prepare themselves, and without dismay, for the anticipation that its first results might be almost heart-breaking and that Ireland under a Parliament of her own might present an initial aspect of confusion worse confounded. If they believe—and I do not see how any other belief is possible—that there is no one cure just as there is no one cause for Irish ills, they will not claim for their remedy any finality of virtue. They will recommend it not as a panacea, but as an auxiliary. Home Rule in its relation to Irish character—and is anything of much moment by the side of character?—holds precisely the position of the Wyndham Act in relation to Irish agriculture. The land tenure system, with its vitiating war of classes and its deflection of the national mind upon the single question of rent, caused the fundamental problems and realities of an agricultural existence to remain neglected and, indeed, almost unrealized. They could only emerge and claim their paramountcy when that system was readjusted. The merit of the Land Purchase Acts is not that they make agriculture a success forthwith, but that they make success possible by creating the conditions in which it is not only worth striving for, but is seen to be worth striving for. They are performing the indispensable work of clearing the ground, leaving it to the peasants themselves to erect on it the best superstructure of which they are capable. In much the same way the Irish mind and character have been poisoned and turned from the channels of productivity and from the understanding of the true source of national well-being by the struggle for Home Rule and the methods by which it has been waged. To grant Home Rule is not to make the Irish character instantaneously strong, but it is to furnish the fusing and essential element out of which strength may be slowly formed, an element which,

with things as they are, is not merely wanting, but is all but unattainable. It is an old truism, but none the worse for being old, that responsibility in the long run is the only thing that makes men responsible; and a people perpetually at strife with its rulers, its national genius thwarted, and its national aspirations throttled, is a people desperately handicapped in the evolution of self-reliance and virility. Ireland, as I have tried to show, is making, on her own initiative, efforts that are little less than heroic to overcome this handicap. She is developing character; she is developing unity; she has started, it might almost seem, on a path which, if it does not end in her being given what she wants, may end in her taking it. The function of England, at its widest, is confined to helping her to help herself. To attempt to supersede her own valiant endeavors after regeneration from within would be as senseless and as futile as to attempt to check them. All that England can usefully do is to second, foster and stimulate them, and to provide the opportunity for their further evocation. It is for that reason, if she is really desirous of Irish well-being, that she will ultimately grant Home Rule.

SYDNEY BROOKS.

THE END.